

On-Site Inventory Project

A Blast from the Past!

By: Interns Clare Tally-Foos and Seema Gajria

Hey guys! We are back with a great new story for you. We have reached the 2000 mark in our inventory and are now currently immersed in the evolution of kitchen appliances.

One of the most obvious objects that has transformed through time is none other than the everyday toaster. Did you know that humans have been eating bread for over 6000 years but the electric toaster is only 104 years old?



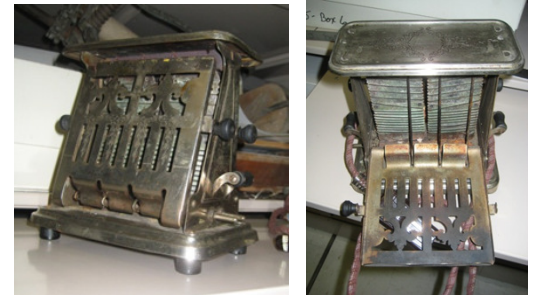
Toaster from RHM's educational collection.

The toaster represents the crest of one wave of technological innovation. It began with a huge effort to electrify the nation. Once homes were wired, a demand grew for household appliances, one of which was the toaster.

But before the electric toaster, individuals seeking the luxury of toasted bread harnessed the power of their wood or coal stoves. Pictured on the left, the grandfather of the electric toaster, a pyramid shaped rack that conducted heat to toast bread.

The first successful "Electric" toaster was produced in 1909 by Frank Shailor from General Electric. In the Renton History Museum, we have several of these early electric toasters, pictured below. These early electric toasters worked by placing the bread on a rack facing the heated electric coils. When the bread was toasted on one side, it was flipped by hand for the toasting of the other side. Can you identify these characteristics in our photos?

But the electric toaster wasn't enough for some people. Lloyd Copeman and his wife, Hazel, were window-shopping one day in 1913 and they were looking at an electric toaster displayed in a store window. The story goes that Hazel, turned to her husband and said, "Lloyd, couldn't you invent a toaster that would automatically turn the toast?" There must be some truth to this as the toaster patent was issued to Hazel B. Copeman in 1914. This was the first toaster that allowed the toast to be "turned" without touching the bread. It was called the "Automatic" toaster. Both Hazel and Lloyd Copeman were issued five toaster related patents during 1914.



Electric toaster (RHM# 1981.002.021)

Various versions of the electric toaster came and went over 50 years, until 1960 when popular demand lead to the rise of the pop-up toaster, which many of you probably have in your kitchen today. Due to 21st Century technological innovations, the modern toaster is not only a kitchen appliance, but has evolved into a personalized home accessory. We will leave you to ponder these final images of truly modern toasters. Have a wonderful day, as we get back to the collection!



Renton History Museum